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JOHN ALBERT

MBFR TALKS: STILL NO PROGRESS

ANNCR:

ONCE AGAIN THE VIENNA NEGOTIATIONS ON MUTUAL BALANCED FORCE REDUCTIONS (MBFR) ARE IN RECESS WITHOUT HAVING ACHIEVED SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IN THE ROUND OF TALKS JUST CONCLUDED. VOA NEWS ANALYST JOHN ALBERT REVIEWS THE MAJOR PROBLEMS AT THIS CONFERENCE.

VOICE: ESSENTIALLY, THE WESTERN NEGOTIATORS IN VIENNA ARE STILL WAITING FOR A POSITIVE EASTERN RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSALS TABLED NINETEEN MONTHS AGO (12/16/75). THE OTHER SIDE DID REACT LAST FEBRUARY WITH A NUMBER OF ITS OWN PROPOSALS, BUT AFTER CAREFUL STUDY, THE WESTERN NEGOTIATORS CONCLUDED THAT THEY PROVIDED NO BASIS FOR PROGRESS.

A MAJOR DIFFICULTY IN LONG MONTHS OF NEGOTIATIONS HAS BEEN THAT ONLY THE WEST HAS PROVIDED DATA ON THE RELATIVE STRENGTHS OF THE OPPOSING FORCES. THE EAST -- WITHOUT ACCEPTING THESE DATA -- HAS REFUSED TO PROVIDE ITS OWN FIGURES. THEN CAME THE FEBRUARY RESPONSE, AND IT APPEARED THAT THE EAST WOULD REMEDY THE SITUATION BY FINALLY OFFERING THEIR OWN FIGURES. HOWEVER, WESTERN SPOKESMAN SAY THAT THE DISCREPANCIES IN TROOP STRENGTH BETWEEN EAST AND WEST LISTS ARE SO GREAT THAT IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER THE EASTERN FIGURES HAVE EVEN BEEN COMPUTED ON A COMPARABLE BASIS WITH THOSE OF THE WEST.

IN ALL OTHER AREAS, THE EASTERN PROPOSAL REPRESENTS NO CHANGE OF POSITION. IT STILL CALLS FOR EQUAL PERCENTAGE CUTS OF ALL FORCES AND ARMAMENTS BY THE MAJOR CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS. THIS, OF COURSE, WOULD CONSOLIDATE IN TREATY FORM THE EXISTING

CONSIDERABLE EASTERN SUPERIORITY IN SOLDIERS AND TANKS, AS WELL AS IN OTHER ARMAMENTS.

ALSO, THE EASTERN POSITION DOES NOT MEET THE CENTRAL WESTERN INTEREST IN PHASED NEGOTIATIONS. THE WEST HAS PROPOSED A FIRST PHASE IN WHICH ONLY THE SOVIET UNION AND THE UNITED STATES WOULD WITHDRAW FORCES. THIS WOULD BE FOLLOWED BY A SECOND PHASE IN WHICH THE OTHER WESTERN NATIONS COMMIT THEMSELVES IN ADVANCE TO REDUCE FORCES TO MEET A COMMON LOWER CEILING. HOWEVER, THE EAST IS NOT READY TO ACCEPT THE WESTERN FIGURES FOR THE SOVIET REDUCTION IN THE FIRST PHASE, AND IT HAS SHOWN NO WILLINGNESS TO COMMIT ITSELF TO A REDUCED COMMON CEILING IN THE SECOND PHASE.

IN PROPOSING THE INITIAL U.S. AND SOVIET WITHDRAWALS, THE WEST ASKS THAT THE SOVIET REDUCTION BE LARGER THAN THAT OF THE UNITED STATES. THE REASON FOR THIS IS TO REMOVE THE LARGE SOVIET SUPERIORITY IN MANPOWER AND TANKS IN CENTRAL EUROPE. (OPT) TO MAKE THIS PROPOSAL MORE ACCEPTABLE, THE UNITED STATES ALSO OFFERED TO REDUCE ITS NUCLEAR WARHEADS IN CENTRAL EUROPE BY A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER, AND TO DO THE SAME WITH AIRCRAFT AND MISSILES WITH NUCLEAR CAPACITY. IT ALSO OFFERED TO BROADEN MANPOWER CEILINGS TO INCLUDE AIR FORCES PERSONNEL AS WELL AS GROUND TROOPS. (END OPT)

THE PURPOSE OF THE WESTERN PROPOSALS IS TO ACHIEVE THE BASIC AIM OF GREATER SECURITY IN CENTRAL EUROPE BY REMOVING THE DANGEROUS IMBALANCE IN GROUND FORCES AND HEAVY WEAPONS. SEEN AS A WHOLE, WESTERN NEGOTIATORS ARGUE, THESE PROPOSALS WOULD ACHIEVE THE DESIRED GREATER SECURITY FOR ALL. ABOVE ALL, THEY TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE GEOGRAPHIC FACTS OF LIFE: THE SOVIET UNION HAS THE SIGNIFICANT ADVANTAGE OF BEING LOCATED

IMMEDIATELY ADJACENT TO THE AREA OF POTENTIAL FORCE REDUCTIONS. OBVIOUSLY, LARGE FORCES ON SOVIET TERRITORY WITH EASY AND RAPID ACCESS TO CENTRAL EUROPE WOULD NOT BE AFFECTED BY ANY AGREEMENT.

DESPITE THE LACK OF ANY BREAKTHROUGH IN MANY MONTHS OF NEGOTIATIONS, WESTERN DELEGATIONS CONTINUE TO HOPE THAT IN THE NEXT ROUND, THE OTHER SIDE WILL SHOW GREATER AWARENESS OF THE SOUNDNESS AND EQUITY OF THE WEST'S OVERALL POSITION.

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